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CDC Health Update

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Multistate Outbreak of *E. coli* O157 Infections, November-December 2006

As of 12:00 PM (EST) Wednesday, December 13, 2006, 71 persons with illness associated with the Taco Bell restaurant *E. coli* O157 outbreak have been reported to CDC from 5 states: New Jersey (33), New York (22), Pennsylvania (13), Delaware (2), and South Carolina (1). States with Taco Bell restaurants where persons confirmed to have the outbreak strain have eaten are New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. (The patient from South Carolina ate at a Taco Bell restaurant in Pennsylvania). Other cases of illness are under investigation by state public health officials. Among these 71 ill persons, 53 (75%) were hospitalized and 8 (11%) developed a type of kidney failure called hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS). Illness onset dates have ranged from November 20 to December 6. The number of cases peaked in the last week of November. No illnesses were reported with onset within the past week, so the outbreak is over.

Cases in 48 of the 71 patients are confirmed, meaning that the patients' *E. coli* O157 strains have the outbreak "DNA fingerprint." *E. coli* O157 strains are routinely "DNA fingerprinted" at public health laboratories in all states as part of PulseNet (the network of public health laboratories that sub-type bacteria). *E. coli* O157 strains from other cases are being tested by PulseNet. As a result of testing by PulseNet, cases with the outbreak strain "fingerprint" pattern are being re-classified as confirmed cases, and cases with an unrelated "fingerprint" pattern are being dropped from the outbreak case count.

CDC is working with state and local health officials, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the restaurant chain to determine what food caused the outbreak. Public health investigators have identified a few ingredients that were consumed more often by ill persons than well persons and were statistically linked with illness: lettuce, cheddar cheese, and ground beef. This analysis also indicates that onions of any type are not linked to this outbreak. Evaluation of additional information about the locations of involved restaurants, the patterns of distribution of food ingredients, and the characteristics and preparation of food ingredients indicates that shredded lettuce consumed at Taco Bell restaurants in the northeastern United States was the most likely source of the outbreak. Because multiple Taco Bell restaurants were involved during the same time period, contamination of lettuce likely occurred before reaching the restaurants. Health officials and the restaurant chain are working collaboratively to learn more about the shredded lettuce to determine how it may have become contaminated.

Health officials in Minnesota and Iowa are investigating a separate outbreak of *E. coli* O157 infections associated with another fast food restaurant chain. They are reporting 27 and 50 associated illnesses, respectively. *E. coli* O157 strains isolated from patients in both states have indistinguishable "DNA fingerprint" patterns, confirming that the Iowa and Minnesota clusters are linked. This pattern is distinct from the Taco Bell restaurant outbreak pattern. A strain that matches that of patients in this new outbreak has also been isolated from an ill person in Wisconsin. Investigators in Minnesota and Iowa have independently identified lettuce as the

contaminated food vehicle. Traceback efforts are underway. The most recent onset of illness from a confirmed case in this outbreak is December 8, and this outbreak is not considered over.

E. coli O157 causes diarrhea that is often bloody and accompanied by severe abdominal cramps, but fever is typically absent or mild. Persons who have developed such symptoms are advised to consult a physician to request that a stool sample be tested for *E. coli*, and to inform their local health department.

For more information

For more information on *E. coli* infection and this outbreak, please refer to the following website:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/>

DHEC Contact Information for Reportable Diseases and Reporting Requirements

Reporting of cases or possible cases of *E. coli* O157 or HUS is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2004 List of Reportable Conditions available at:

http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable_conditions.pdf

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

Regional Public Health Offices

Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region.

Region 1

Anderson, Oconee

220 McGee Road
Anderson, SC 29625
Phone: (864) 260-4358
Fax: (864) 260-5623
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-298-4442

Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Saluda

1736 S. Main Street
Greenwood, SC 29646
Phone: 1-888-218-5475
Fax: (864) 942-3690
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-420-1915

Region 2

Greenville, Pickens

PO Box 2507
200 University Ridge
Greenville, SC 29602-2507
Phone: (864) 282-4139
Fax: (864) 282-4373
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-993-1186

Cherokee, Spartanburg, Union

PO Box 4217
151 E. Wood Street
Spartanburg, SC 29305-4217
Phone: (864) 596-2227, x- 210
Fax: (864) 596-3443
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-993-1186

Region 3

Chester, Lancaster, York

PO Box 817
1833 Pageland Highway
Lancaster, SC 29721
Phone: (803) 286-9948
Fax: (803) 286-5418
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-867-3886

Region 3 (continued)

Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry, Richland

2000 Hampton Street
Columbia, SC 29204
Phone: (803) 576-2749
Fax: (803) 576-2993
Nights / Weekends: 1-888-554-9915

Region 4

Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Sumter

PO Box 1628
105 North Magnolia Street
Sumter, SC 29150
Phone: (803) 773-5511
Fax: (803) 775-9941
Nights/Weekends: 1-877-831-4647

Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marlboro, Marion

145 E. Cheves Street
Florence, SC 29506
Phone: (843) 661-4830
Fax: (843) 661-4859
Nights / Weekends: (843) 660-8145

Region 5

Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg

PO Box 1126
1550 Carolina Avenue
Orangeburg, SC 29116
Phone: (803) 533-7199
Fax: (803) 533-7134
Nights / Weekends: (803) 954-8513

Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell

1680 Richland Avenue, W. Suite 40
Aiken, SC 29801
Phone: (803) 642-1618
Fax: (803) 643-8386
Nights / Weekends: (803) 827-8668 or
1-800-614-1519

Region 6

Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg

2830 Oak Street
Conway, SC 29526-4560
Phone: (843) 365-3126, x-138 or x-174
Fax: (843) 365-3153
Nights / Weekends: (843) 381-6710

Region 7

Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester

4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600
N. Charleston, SC 29405
Phone: (843) 746-3806
Fax: (843) 746-3851
Nights / Weekends: (843) 219-8470

Region 8

Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper

219 S. Lemacks Street
Walterboro, SC 29488
Phone: (843) 549-1516, x-214
Fax: (843) 549-6845
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-614-4698

DHEC Bureau of Disease Control

Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology

1751 Calhoun Street
Box 101106
Columbia, SC 29211
Phone: (803) 898-0861
Fax: (803) 898-0897
Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902



Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.